

Bill Salisbury, *Pioneer Press*

Speaking for tea party activists, Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann responded to President Barack Obama's State of the Union address Tuesday night by calling for deep cuts in the size and scope of the federal government.

In a nationally televised rebuttal on CNN, Bachmann criticized Obama for an "unprecedented explosion of government spending and debt ... unlike anything we have seen in the history of our country."

The Stillwater-area Republican congresswoman, who is toying with the idea of running for president next year, suggested steps she thinks Obama should take to create jobs and fix the economy.

The chair of the House Tea Party Caucus called for stopping the Environmental Protection Agency from imposing a "job-destroying cap-and-trade system."

She asked Obama to agree to sign a balanced-budget constitutional amendment.

To reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil, she advocated an energy policy that increases American energy production.

She also proposed cutting back regulations that drag down the economy.

"And the president should repeal 'Obamacare' and support free-market solutions," she said.

Referring to last year's election that handed Republicans control of the House, Bachmann said, "Thanks to you, there's reason for all of us to have hope that real spending cuts are coming."

"We believe in lower taxes; we believe in a limited view of government and American exceptionalism," she said.

Her televised statement, sponsored by the Tea Party Express organization, followed the official Republican response offered by Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan.

Some Republicans worried that Bachmann's tea party message might conflict with the party line, but she avoided the fiery rhetoric that has made her a hit at tea party rallies and on talk radio and cable TV.

Other members of the Minnesota delegation gave Obama's speech more favorable reviews.

Democratic Sen. Al Franken said the highlight was the president's theme of "winning the future." Minnesota has built prosperity by emphasizing infrastructure, education and "RD," he said, and Obama emphasized those strategies.

"So much of what he said resonated with what I've heard the last few weeks in Minnesota" at the state's schools and colleges, Franken said.

"There's really no way out of this long-term deficit unless we grow," he said, and Obama provided a plan for growth.

Many congressional Democrats and Republicans sat with members of the opposition party, including Franken. As a result, he said, "a lot of the silly gamesmanship was gone."

Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar, who also sat next to a Republican, agreed. "It was less of a partisan pep fest, less groaning and less cheering and a little more sobering, and I think that is the right mood for some of the work that we need to do," she said.

Klobuchar liked Obama's emphasis on innovation and keeping a competitive edge, which she called the keys to success in the "state that brought the world everything from the pacemaker to the Post-It note." She also applauded his focus on expanding exports and reducing government red tape for businesses.

Rep. Betty McCollum, the St. Paul Democrat, praised the president's call for investments that will create new jobs.

"In order to achieve his top goal of job creation, which is my top goal and I believe every constituent I've talked to, we have to continue investing in education, innovation and research and rebuilding our infrastructure," she said.

Republican Rep. John Kline of Lakeville gave the president a mixed review. He liked his remarks on the need for regulatory relief, the importance of working together and his support for soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines fighting overseas.

But Obama's references to past controversial bills were "not helpful," he said. And the president was not clear about what investments he was proposing for education, research and technology, "but as we've learned, investments are spending and we don't know how much spending he's calling for."

"We are in just horrible straits right now with a horrific amount of debt, and I believe and Republicans believe the responsible thing to do is cut spending," Kline said.